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# Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
----------062220 271955Z /47
O 271809Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5514

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 0408

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, NU
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA: JANUARY 26, 1978

1. AMBASSADOR ACCEPTED PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S INVITATION TO LUNCH WHICH HAD BEEN PLANNED FOR ASST. SEC. TODMAN AND HAD TWO HOUR CANDID CONVERSATION.

2. SOMOZA BEGAN BY DESCRIBING THE NATIONAL WORK STOPPAGE AS SOMETHING WHICH THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAD BEEN PLANNING SINCE THE EARTHQUAKE
.
BUSINESS LEADERSHIP COLLAPSED WITH THE EARTHQUAKE, HE SAID, AND THE BUSINESS PEOPLE COULD NOT FORGIVE HOW HE WITH A FEW SOLDIERS AND SERGEANTS HAD TAKEN CHARGE AND RESTORED ORDER. HE SAID HE WOULD HAVE ACTED MORE HARSHLY OR RASHLY AGAINST THE PROMOTERS OF THE STRIKE IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE FACT THE USG WAS BEHIND THESE PEOPLE.

3. AMB. REPLIED THIS WAS A SERIOUS STATEMENT AND ASKED FOR SPECIFICS. AMB. SAID HE COULD NOT PERMIT SUCH A STATEMENT TO GO UNCLARIFIED. HE INDICATED THERE ARE TWO PRINCIPAL PROBLEMS IN NICARAGUA: THAT THERE IS A HIGH PROPENSITY FOR RUMORS, AND THAT THERE IS A PATHOLOGICAL DESIRE TO INVOLVE THE U.S. IN LOCAL POLITICS. AMB. REFERRED TO TWO RECENTLY REPLACED CABINET OFFICERS HAVING CLAIMED THEY WERE REPLACED BECAUSE OF THE U.S. HE SAID THE PRESIDENT KNEW BETTER; THAT OUR
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ONLY COMMENTS HAD BEEN GENERAL IN TERMS OF THE ADVANTAGE TO THE COUNTRY TO HAVE TURNOVER; THAT THIS INVIGORATED THE SYSTEM. AMB. STATED THAT AS A COROLLARY A LOT OF POLITICAL GROUPS CAME TO TELL US WHAT THEY WERE PLANNING AND WOULD BE UPSET IF WE DIDN'T LISTEN TO THEM. HE SAID THE PRESIDENT KNEW THAT THE INSTRUCTIONS FROM WASHINGTON WERE FOR US TO KEEP OUR DOORS OPEN. HE SAID THAT AS AN EXAMPLE THE OFFICIAL CONSERVATIVES USUALLY CAME TO SEE US, BUT SURPRISINGLY THEY

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DIDN'T INFORM US OF THEIR LAST POLITICAL ACT: THE DEMAND FOR THE PRESIDENT'S RESIGNATION. HE FURTHER SAID THAT IN NO CASE HAD AMB. OR HIS STAFF TOLD THE OPPOSITION THAT WE SUPPORTED THEM OR WERE IN FAVOR OF OVERTHROWING THE GOVERNMENT. RATHER WE INSISTED ON OUR NEUTRALITY.

4. PRESIDENT SOMOZA REPLIED DEFENSIVELY THAT HE WAS NOT COMPLAINING ABOUT THE EMBASSY. (AT NO TIME DID HE PROVIDE SPECIFIC BACKUP TO HIS ASSERTION THAT USG BEHIND OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES.) HIS PROBLEMS, HE SAID, WERE WITH THE LIBERALS IN WASHINGTON--IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT--WHO ALLEGEDLY HAVE A DIRECT CONTACT WITH SOMOZA'S OPPONENTS.

5. THE AMBASSADOR STATED HE HAD BEEN INFORMED BY LUIS PALLAIS DEBAYLE (THE PRESIDENT'S COUSING AND POLITICAL SPOKESMAN) AND A CABINET MINISTER THAT THE GON STATED THE AMB.A AND EMBASSY WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CURRENT PROBLEMS. HE SAID IF THE PRESIDENT BELIEVED THIS WAS NOT TRUE HE SHOULD CLARIFY THIS TO THE PEOPLE AROUND HIM. IT WAS CLEAR THESE PEOPLE WERE TRYING TO MAKE US A SCAPEGOAT; THIS IS CLEARLY WHAT THEY ARE DOING. THE AMB. WENT ON TO REMIND PRESIDENT THAT HE RECENTLY HAD MET WITH YOUNG SOMOCISTAS AND AFTER THE NATIONAL WORK STOPPAGE HAD BEGUN HAD ATTENDED WITH MINISTER OF HEALTH A A GOVERNMENT CEREMONY FOR A NURSES COURSE AND ANOTHER MEETING ON HEALTH PROGRAMS PRESIDED OVER BY MRS. SOMOZA AND THAT ALL THREE EVENTS HAD PRESS COVERAGE.

6. SOMOZA REPLIED THAT HE HAD TOLD HIS PEOPLE THAT THE AMB. IS ONLY CONFIDENTIAL

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FOLLOWING OFFICIAL POLICY AND THAT THERE WAS NOTHING PERSONAL IN HIS MEETING WITH OPPOSITIONISTS.

7. THE AMB. DESCRIBED THE PRESENT SITUATION AS PRESENTING TWO PRINCIPAL ALTERNATIVES FOR U.S. POLICY OTHER THAN THE CURRENT "CORRECT" RELATIONSHIP. THERE COULD BE A DIMINUTION OF THE USG PRESENCE OR OUR RELATIONS COULD BECOME WARMER. FOR THE LATTER TO OCCUR, IN HIS PERSONAL OPINION, IT WOULD REQUIRE THE CONVICTION IN WASHINGTON THAT PRESIDENT SOMOZA AND HIS SONE OR FAMILY WOULD RELINQUISH CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT AND NATIONAL GUARD IN 1981. HE SAID THERE IS DISTRUST IN WASHINGTON OF SOMOZA'S INTENTIONS. WITH REGARD TO THE FIRST POSSIBILITY, THE U.S. WOULD DIMINISH ITS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS TO THE POINT THEY WERE VIRTUALLY NONEXISTENT.

8. THE PRESIDENT SAID HE FELT THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO TO CONVINCE PEOPLE OF HIS INTENTIONS TO STEP DOWN IN 1981. THE AMB. SAID HE WAS SURE THAT THERE WERE SYMBOLIC GESTURES WHICH WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO SUCH A BELIEF.

9. THE AMB. EXPRESSED CONCERN REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY FOR ESCALATING CONFLICT IN NICARAGUA AND SAID HE FELT THERE IS A NEED TO INSTITUTIONALIZE MECHANISMS SO THAT NEW POLITICAL AND BUSINESS GROUPS

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COULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE COUNTRY BY PARTICIPA-
TING WITHIN LEGAL BOUNDARIES. THE PRESIDENT REPLIED THAT EVERYONE
HAD A CHANGE TO BE HEARD BY HIS GOVERNMENT.

10. THE AMB.SAID HE WANTED TO BE VERY OPEN, THAT HE WAS NOT ENGAGING
IN INTRIGUE, THAT HE WANTED SOMOZA TO KNOW THAT THERE IS A BELIEF,
NOT ONLY IN NICARAGUA BUT IN WASHINGTON, THAT TACHITO (MAJOR ANAS-
TASIO SOMOZA PORTOCARRERO, THE PRESIDENT'S 26-YEAR OLD SON) IS BEING
TRAINED TO TAKE OVER THE NATIONAL GUARD (GN) IN 1981 THROUGH RETIRE-
MENT OF MORE SENIOR OFFICERS. SOMOZA SAID THAT IS NOT ACCURATE,
THAT TACHITO IS VERY YOUNG AND THERE IS NO WAY HE COULD HEAD THE GN
IN THE SHORT TERM AND THAT HE WOULD NOT BE LEFT IN COMMAND IN 1981.
HE IMPLIED, HOWEVER, THAT TACHITO WOULD RETAIN AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE
GN. HE ADDED THAT HE DID NOT BELIEV IN EXCEPTIONAL PROMOTIONS, THAT
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THE GN WOULDN'T STAND FOR IT, THAT NICARAGUANS WERE NOT LIKE THAT.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
----------062372 272003Z /47
O 271809Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5515

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANAGUA 0408

EXDIS

11. SOMOZA SAID FURTHER HE WANTED THE AMBASSADOR TO UNDERSTAND HIS
POSITION AS A FATHER. HE HAD TO HELP HIS SON GET ESTABLISHED IN A
PROFESSION. HE SAID TACHITO WS INTERESTED IN THE GN, NOT IN
BUSINESS. HE SAID HIS SON HAD A LOT OF MERIT, DESPITE HIS
FLAT FEET; HE WORKED HARD. THE AMB. REPLIED THAT OUR MILITARY PERSON-
NEL HAD BEEN IMPRESSED WITH MAJOR SOMOZA'S BEARING AND POTENTIAL BUT
THAT THERE IS A PROBLEM OF FORM. AMB. REFERRED TO THE COLOMBIAN EX-
AMPLE OF PRESIDENT LOPEZ MICHELSEN, AN EX-PRESIDENTJS SON BECOMING
PRESIDENT BUT IT WAS NOT A POSITION HANDED DOWN; IT WAS NOT IN A

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"FORMA BURDA" I.E. CRASS. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT HE WAS PRECISELY TRYING NOT TO BE CRASS AND JOKINGLY SAID, "WELL, MAYBE WE'S HAVE TO SEND TACHITO TO TIMBUKTU TO PLEASE YOU."

12. THE AMB. EXPANDED ON HIS CONCERN BY STATING THAT NICARAGUA IS NOT A MONARCHICAL SYSTEM LIKE GREAT BRITAIN. IF IT WERE THERE WOULD NOT BE THESEPROBLEMS: TACHITO COULD BE ACCEPTED AT PREDETERMINTED AGES TO CARRY OUT VARIOUS MILITARY ROLES. BUT THAT IS NOT THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT HERE. SOMOZA AGREED THAT THE BASIC PROBLEM WAS TO FIND AN ADAPTATION BETWEEN NICARAGUA'S CONSTITUTIONALLY MANDATED REPUBLICAN, DEMOCRATIC FORM OF GOVERNMENT AND THE REALITY IN NICARAGUA, WHICH IMPEDED THE FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MANDATE.

13. THE AMB. STATED HE WOULD BE SEEING ASST. SEC. TODMAN TOMORROW, JANUARY 27, AND WOULD BE WILLING TO EXPLORE WITH HIM THE TYPE OF GESTURES WHICH MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO MORE COOPERATIVE U.S.-GON RELA-
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TIONS. THIS ELICITED NO ACTIVE INTEREST BY PRESIDENT. AMB. ALSO SAID THAT ONE OF THE APPARENT PROBLEMS WITH THE CURRENT HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY IS THAT IT DOES NOT ESTABLISH PRECISE PARAMETERS AS TO WHAT WE EXPECTED OTHER GOVERNMENTS TO DO. PRESIDENT AGREED AND RETURNED TO THIS POINT AT CLOSE OF CONVERSATION. SOMOZA EXPRESSED CONCERN REGARDING U.S. VOTING AGAINST IFI LOANS FOR NICARAGUA.

14. THE AMBASSADOR SAID THAT THE U.S. WAS NOT GOING TO INSIST THAT THE LIBERALS YIELD POWER TO THE OPPOSITION IF THE OPPOSITION DID NOT HAVE MAJORITY SUPPORT. SOMOZA REPLIED THAT THE OPPOSITION IS A MINORITY AND THAT HE NEVER WOULD GIVEN THEM POWER. HE ASKED THE AMBASSADOR TO TELL THE OPPOSITION HE IS IN GOOD HEALTH; THAT HE IS NOT GOING TO LET HIMSELF BE SCREWED; THAT HE PLANS TO BE AROUND FOR ANOTHER THIRTY YEARS. HE SAID HE IS NOW READY TO START USING THE LIBERAL PARTY TO SHOW COUNTERFORCE TO THE OPPOSITION AND THAT HE WAS GOING TO GET TOUGH WITH OPPOSITION BUSINESSMEN WHO WERE HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS. HE SAID THAT WHEN THEY HAD PROBLEMS THEY CAME TO THE GON TO HELP THEM AND THIS IS HOW THEY REPAY THAT HELP. HE REFERRED TO INDE PRESIDENT ROBELO AS A SMART KID, BUT MISGUIDED. HE SAID ROBELO WANTED TO BE PRESIDENT BUT THAT NOT EVERYONE CAN BE PRESIDENT.

15. THE AMBASSADOR COUNSELED TAKING IT EASY AGAINST THE BUSINESS GROUPS ON STRIKE, THAT IT WAS PREFERABLE TO BE DEMOCRATIC, THAT AFTER ALL HE WAS A WEST POINT GRADUATE. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT BASICALLY THE STRIKERS WERE CONSERVATIVE PARTY BUSINESSMEN WHO RESENTED HIS PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL POLICIES AND TAXES. THAT HE KNEW THAT THE U.S. WAS REDUCING ITS FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TO ALL COUNTRIES BECAUSE OF ITS OWN BALANCE OF PAYMENTS PROBLEMS THAT THAT CONSEQUENTLY HE HAD TO INCREASE TAXES ON BUSINESS ENTERPRISES. HE FURTHER INDICATED THAT HE IS GOING TO STRENGTHEN HIS HAND IN THE ECONOMY BY EXPANDING THE PUBLIC SECTOR. HE SAID THAT ALTHOUGH HIS CONTROL OF NICARAGUAN GOVERNMENT ENTITIES PLUS THE SOMOZA PRIVATE INTERESTS

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GIVES HIM A COMFORTABLE MARGIN FOR NEUTRALIZATING THE PRIVATE
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SECTION OPPOSITION, IT DESERVES TO BE PUNISHED.

16. SOMOZA, IN PARTING, ASKED THE AMBASSADOR TO TELL ASST. SEC. TODMAN, THAT THE U.S. SHOULD LET HIM KNOW PRIVATELY WHAT OUR HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS ARE, THAT ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT CARTER WAS NOT HIS FRIEND, SOMOZA WAS A FRIEND TO THE U.S. AND THAT OUR CURRENT POLICIES WERE ONLY MAKING ENEMIES FOR THE U.S.

17. COMMENT: PRESIDENT SOMOZA REVEALED THAT EVEN THOUGH HIS PRESENT INTENTION IS TO STEP DOWN AS PRESIDENT IN 1981, HE WILL NOT COMMIT HIMSELF TO SURRENDERING FAMILY CONTROL OF THE GN. MOREOVER, HE FEELS THAT THE SOMOZAS MUST CONTINUE TO PLAY THE PARAMOUNT POLITICAL ROLE IN NICARAGUA. HE CONTINUES CONFIDENT OF HIS POWER AND IN HIS VIEW OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS THERE ARE NO BASIC LEGAL CONSTRAINTS TO SOMOZA RULE. HE CONTINUES TO RESENT PUBLIC CRITICIMS OF HIS RULE BY USG (E.G. NEGATIVE VOTES IN IFI, LEAKS OF DEMARCHES) BELIEVING THAT THESE ENCOURAGE ESCALATION OF OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING ILLEGAL REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITIES. DESPITE OUR CONTINUED INSISTENCE THAT WE ARE NOT ATTEMPTING TO DESTABLIZE GON, SOMOZA CLEARLY BELIEVES THAT SOME OF OUR ACTIONS IN FACT HAVE THAT EFFECT.
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# Message Attributes

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